SIDING SYSTEM COMPONENT FOR RECEIVING A UTILITY-RELATED STRUCTURE AND RELATED METHOD

Erik K. Jurvis

Technical Field and Industrial Applicability of the Invention

The present invention is related generally to the construction/wall covering art and, more particularly, to a siding system component for receiving and/or providing an engagement surface for utility-related structures adjacent to an external wall of a dwelling.

Background of the Invention

For centuries, dwellings or like structures have been constructed from natural logs or timbers. Even many modern homeowners consider such dwellings desirable, primarily because of the natural, rustic look and feel afforded as a result of this type of construction. However, despite significant technological advances in recent years and the proliferation of commercial enterprises offering custom building services, constructing an entire dwelling from logs or timbers remains an expensive, time consuming and labor intensive undertaking, requiring countless man hours and a great deal of natural resources to complete.

In recent decades, a concern has also arisen over the excessive exploitation of natural resources, such as timber. This concern has prompted many in the construction art to switch to building materials fabricated of metal, vinyl, or the like. In the particular case of a log dwelling, a related concern is that, unless properly constructed by experts, such dwellings may lack the ability to contain properly conditioned air and keep out moisture, both of which may significantly increase the overall cost of owning such a dwelling, especially in

terms of energy costs.

As an alternative to using actual logs or timbers, others in the past have proposed various types of siding members, such as strips fabricated of vinyl or like materials, that simulate the appearance of a natural log or timber. When a plurality of these siding strips are applied to the outside of a dwelling or other structure in an abutting or overlapping relationship, the appearance of a traditional log cabin is simulated, yet conventional construction materials are employed beneath the siding strips to provide the structural framework for the dwelling. As should be appreciated, siding strips formed of vinyl or the like are cheaper than wood per unit, easier to install, lighter in weight, relatively durable and generally resistant to the effects of moisture. Also, the use of conventional building materials beneath the siding strips (e.g., framed wall construction with insulation, an outer layer of wood sheeting, and an inner layer of drywall sheeting) improves the overall efficiency of the dwelling in terms of energy containment.

Despite these advantages, past proposals for vinyl siding, including siding of the type used to simulate the appearance of a cabin or dwelling formed of logs, are generally lacking in some key respects. For instance, all known proposals for siding systems generally ignore the need for pieces or components that are specially designed to receive and/or support common utility-related structures that project through the exterior walls of a building or dwelling, such as electrical sockets, spigots, or the like. While merely cutting a hole in the siding to allow the structure to pass is possible (and indeed is the conventional practice), this usually leaves an unsightly gap between the component and the siding strip. Unless this gap is properly sealed, water may easily penetrate to the wall behind the siding strips. This water may not only cause the wall boards to warp and leave stains on the interior drywall, but may also contribute to the ultimate demise of the dwelling. Accordingly, a need

is identified for an improved component for receiving and/or supporting a utility-related component adjacent to an external, siding-covered wall in a house, dwelling, or the like.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to a component for use in a siding system. In particular, the component may be employed in a siding system including at least one siding strip for partially covering an external wall of a building or dwelling and receiving or assisting in supporting an adjacent utility-related structure. The siding strip includes a receiver, and the component is intended for use in covering at least a portion of the wall left exposed by the siding strip. Thus, the component comprises a body for attachment adjacent to the siding strip for at least partially covering the exposed portion of the wall. The body includes an integral fastener for engaging the receiver of the siding strip and an opening having a predetermined size and shape for receiving the utility-related structure.

In one embodiment, the body includes an engagement surface that surrounds the opening. The engagement surface, which may be substantially parallel to the wall, serves to at least partially engage a second utility-related structure, such as a face plate or cover. At least one, and preferably a plurality of fastener receiving apertures may also be provided in the body, each for receiving a non-integral fastener, such as a screw, that assists in supporting the body adjacent to the wall. In addition to fastener-receiving apertures, the body may further include at least one hole adjacent to the opening for receiving a fastener for assisting in securing a portion of the utility-related structure, such as a face plate or cover, to the body. The body may further include an integral portion having a surface that simulates the appearance of grout or chinking between the component and an adjacent siding strip.

In one embodiment, the integral fastener of the component is hook-like in shape and includes an outwardly directed surface that simulates the appearance of grout or chinking between the component and an adjacent siding strip. The body of the component may also include at least two integral fasteners, each for engaging a receiver in one of an adjacent pair of siding strips.

In a second embodiment, an adjacent siding strip includes a structure for engaging the component, and the body includes a plate-like portion for receiving a non-integral fastener for attaching the body to the wall. A receiver for receiving the engagement structure of the siding strip is also provided.

In any of the embodiments, at least a portion of the body may be outwardly bowed to simulate the appearance of a log or timber. Also, the opening may be initially occupied by at least one frangible portion of the body. This frangible portion is removed before passing the first utility-related structure through the opening. The at least one frangible portion may be defined by a plurality of cutouts or slits formed in the body.

In accordance with a second aspect of the invention, a component for intended use in a siding system including at least one siding strip having a profile that is outwardly bowed to simulate the appearance of a log or timber is provided. The siding strip partially covers an external wall of a building or dwelling and receives or supports a first utility-related structure. The component comprises a body for attachment adjacent to the siding strip for at least partially covering the exposed portion of the wall. The body also has a profile that is outwardly bowed relative to a vertical plane to simulate the appearance of a log or timber, as well as an opening having a predetermined shape and size for receiving the first utility-related structure. Means for attaching the body adjacent to the wall is also provided, which may comprise, for example, fasteners integral with the body, non-integral fasteners, or both. The body may also overlie a

portion of the siding strip, or may be positioned adjacent to the siding strip, including possibly in a different horizontal plane.

In accordance with a third aspect of the invention, a siding system for at least partially covering an external wall of a dwelling or building and receiving and supporting a first utility-related structure is provided. The system comprises at least one siding strip fastened to and covering at least a portion of the wall. The siding strip includes at least one first receiver. A component is also provided for attachment adjacent to the wall for covering at least a portion left exposed by the at least one siding strip. In addition to an integral fastener for engaging the receiver in the siding strip, the component further includes an opening having a predetermined size for receiving the first utility-related structure.

In one embodiment, a non-integral fastener, such as a screw or nail, is also provided, and the component includes at least one fastener-receiving aperture through which the non-integral fastener is placed into engagement with the wall. Preferably, first and second fasteners are provided integral with the component, with each having a hook-like shape. These hook-like integral fasteners fit into receivers in one of an adjacent pair of first and second siding strips. One of the first or second siding strips may also include a first surface simulating the appearance of grout or chinking between said strips, and one of the first or second hook-like integral fasteners may further include a second surface that simulates the appearance of grout or chinking for placement over the first surface when the component is in an installed position.

In accordance with a fourth aspect of the invention, a method for at least partially covering an external wall of a building or dwelling and supporting a utility-related structure adjacent to at least one siding strip affixed to the wall is provided. The method comprises the following steps, which may be performed in any order: (1) securing a component adjacent to the wall by

placing an integral fastener in engagement with a receiver on the siding strip, which at least partially covers an exposed portion of the wall; (2) forming an opening in the component having a predetermined shape and size for receiving the utility-related structure projecting from the wall; and (3) passing the utility-related structure through the opening.

In one embodiment, the component includes a frangible portion, and the step of forming an opening in the component includes removing the frangible portion. The component may also include an engagement surface surrounding the opening, in which case the method further includes placing a second portion of the utility related structure in engagement with said surface. The step of securing the component may include placing one or more non-integral fasteners through the component into the wall. In the case where a pair of adjacent first and second siding strips are provided, the step of securing the component may include placing a first hook-like integral fastener of the component in engagement with a first receiver in a first siding strip and placing a second hook-like integral fastener of the component in engagement with a second receiver in a second siding strip.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a partially cutaway perspective view of a wall having siding strips forming part of a siding system affixed thereto, said system including one embodiment of the component forming a part of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a perspective view of one embodiment of the component;

Figure 3a is a partially cutaway, perspective view of an example of a siding strip for use in the siding system also forming a part of the present invention;

Figure 3b is a partially cutaway, partially cross-sectional view taken along line 3b-3b of Figure 1;

Figure 4 is a cross-sectional view of one embodiment of the component taken along line 4-4 of Figure 2;

Figure 5 is a partially exploded, perspective view showing the manner in which utility-related structures, such as an electrical socket and corresponding face plate, may be secured to and supported by the component;

Figure 6 is a partially cutaway view of the component installed in a different manner;

Figure 7 is a perspective view illustrating the component for receiving a utility-related structure in the form of a water pipe with a spigot;

Figure 8 is a perspective view of another embodiment of the component;

Figure 9a is a perspective view of yet another embodiment of the component;

Figure 9b is a rear elevational view of the embodiment of Figure 9a; and

Figure 10 shows another embodiment of the component.

Detailed Description and Preferred Embodiments of the Invention

Reference is now made to Figure 1, which illustrates an external wall W of a dwelling (not shown) covered by a plurality of siding strips S. Conventionally, the wall W is formed of one or more sheets T of plywood or oriented strand board (OSB), or foam board. These sheets T are typically nailed or otherwise fastened to the underlying framed construction formed of structural members, such as "2 x 4's", oriented as vertically extending "studs" D (see the full side view in Figure 3b) that help to rigidify and provide support for the wall W.

In a typical siding system, the plurality of siding strips S are sequentially applied or affixed to the surface of the wall W. Specifically, as shown in Figure 1, a first siding strip S_1 is horizontally oriented and affixed to the wall W, such as by using conventional fasteners (preferably nails N, as shown in Figure 3b, but staples, screws, tacks, or other mechanical fasteners could also be used). A starter strip (not shown) may be first installed to hold the top or bottom of the first row of siding in an interlocking manner, to secure a portion of the first strip to the wall. A second siding strip S_2 is then horizontally oriented, positioned adjacent to the siding strip S_1 (possibly in an interlocking relationship, as outlined in more detail in the description that follows), and affixed to the wall W. Another siding strip, S_0, is then positioned adjacent to strip S_1, such as shown in Fig. 1 directly below S_1 (or above it, not shown). This pattern is repeated by sequentially positioning the next-in-line horizontally extending siding strip S_{n+1} or S_{n-1} adjacent to the previously applied siding strip S_n to cover and protect the wall W from the outside environment, and preferably in an interlocking manner. Normally, the strips S are elongated (see, e.g., Figure 3a) with a finite length (usually between 8-10 feet, but can be longer or shorter), and hence are also positioned adjacent to each other in the same horizontal plane, usually with a slight (1-2") overlap. Preferably, the locations at which adjacent strips meet in an overlapping relationship are staggered among the different horizontal planes, so as to avoid creating a visible "seam" running vertically along the particular surface of the wall W being covered.

During installation, a siding strip, such as strip S_1 in Figure 1, may be placed over a location adjacent to where a utility-related structure is placed. The utility-related structure may include a pipe, one or more electrical, cable, or telephone wires, dryer vent pipe or any other type of conduit. It may also include a support member for a light fixture or other support structure that is fastened to the wall W and supported in a cantilevered fashion. The particular

nature of the utility-related structure, or whether it extends from or passes through all or even a portion of the wall W, is not considered critical to the present invention.

The conventional practice is to manually form a rough opening in the strip S_1 (or at the interface between the adjacent overlapping ends of strips laying in the same horizontal plane) using a cutting device, such as a knife, that allows at least a portion of the particular utility-related structure to pass. The wire, pipe, or other part of the utility-related structure is then passed through the rough opening and possibly connected to a fixture also forming a part of the utility-related structure, such as an electrical socket, spigot, external light, or the like. Once the siding is affixed to the wall W, the worker uses his best efforts to place a sealant between the edges of the opening in the siding strip and the adjacent utility-related structure. A makeshift cover or face plate may then be positioned over the utility-related structure to at least partially cover the opening, but achieving a tight seating engagement with the typically planar engagement surface of the cover or plate and the outer surface of the siding strip is difficult. This is especially true in the case where the siding strip S, such as strip S_1 is outwardly bowed relative to a vertical plane to simulate the appearance of a "half-round" log, as is the case in Figure 1.

To overcome this shortcoming, the present invention comprises a siding system component 10 for attachment adjacent to the wall W and at least one existing siding strip, such as strip S_1. The component 10 is designed to at least partially cover the portion of the wall W adjacent to where part of the utility-related structure, such as a wire or pipe, is located (which may be exposed by cutting the siding strip S_1, or by placing two spaced siding strips adjacent to each other in the same horizontal plane, as outlined further in the description that follows), yet allow the necessary structures to pass. It preferably also provides a planar surface for engaging other components of the utility-related structure,

such as a cover, face plate, or the like.

To accomplish these and other goals, the component 10 forming a part of the present invention includes a body 12 for attachment adjacent to a portion of the wall W left exposed by the adjacent siding strip, which may be strip S_1. The body 12 is provided with an opening 14 for receiving at least a portion of the utility related structure. In one embodiment, the body 12 has at least one frangible portion 16 that may be manually removed to form the opening 14 (compare Figures 2 and 5), but forming the opening during the process of manufacturing the component 10 is also possible (such as during injection molding).

In the former case, the at least one frangible portion 16 may be provided in a predetermined size and shape to form the opening 14 that allows the utility related structure to pass. In the particular embodiment shown in Figure 2, the frangible portion 16 is circular, and is defined by a plurality of arcuate cut-outs or slots 16a. However, other arrangements that allow for a portion of the body 10 to be removed to expose one or more differently sized openings are also possible. For example, the component 10 may be designed for special use in receiving and supporting an electrical socket, which is generally rectangular in shape (see socket K in Figure 5). While a circular opening 14 such as the one shown in Figure 2 could be sized for receiving the socket K, the corresponding face plate FP or cover must be oversized to ensure that the resulting opening 14 is completely covered. To avoid this, the frangible portion 16 may be rectangular in shape (see Figure 8) to form a rectangular opening specially adapted for receiving the socket K, which is easily covered by the corresponding rectangular face plate FP.

As also depicted in Figure 8, yet another possible arrangement is to provide more than one frangible portion, with each capable of forming an opening 14 having a different orientation, shape, or size. For example, in the

case of the socket K described above, a cross-shaped frangible portion 16 may be provided by overlapping two rectangular frangible portions, each defined by cutouts or slits 16a. As should be appreciated, this particular arrangement allows for one segment of the frangible portion 16, such as a horizontally oriented segment, to be removed, while the remainder of the frangible portion remains intact. Conversely, the vertically oriented portion could be removed to create an opening for the vertically oriented socket, while the remainder of the horizontally oriented portion remains intact. Instead of rectangles, it is of course also possible to form the frangible portion 16 as a plurality of concentric (or overlapping or adjacent) circles (not shown) that may be separately detached, or in any other shape necessitated by the particular application. In a preferred embodiment, the frangible portion is provided by molding an series of indentations on the back surface of the part 10, so the engagement surface 18 does not exhibit any discontinuities or depressions. Alternatively, these may be formed through the part 10 or from the (exterior) engagement surface 18, or both. Or one opening may be visible from the exterior and a number of frangible portions 16 may be formed on the backside thereof.

In any case, an engagement surface 18 is provided around the opening 14, whether initially formed by a frangible portion 16 or otherwise. This engagement surface 18 preferably is substantially planar and parallel to the wall W. Hence, this surface 18 is adapted for engaging a component associated with or forming a necessary part of the utility-related structure, such as a face plate FP for the electrical socket K (see Figure 5) or a cover C (see Figures 6 and 7). Although not shown, the engagement surface 18 may be recessed from the raised surface 18 shown in Fig. 8, so any article mounted thereto may be protected from the elements (such as rain) and/or mounted substantially flush to an outer surface of the siding.

As perhaps best shown in Figure 5, the surface 18 may further

include a plurality of holes 19 for receiving fasteners, such as screws 19a, that serve to secure part of the utility-related structure, such as an electrical socket K, to the component 10. In the case of a socket K, the fasteners 19a may extend through apertures in mounting tabs M. The apertures or holes 19 in the component 10 may also be initially covered by frangible portions as well (not shown). Alternatively, if the holes 19 are not present, a conventional hole-forming device, such as a hand-held electric drill, may be used, and dimples may be formed on the part 10 to serve as a guide for any such drilling. Still another alternative is to simply form the hole simultaneously with the installation of the particular fastener 19a, such as a screw.

As also illustrated in Figure 5, the socket K is connected to the electrical wires E passing through or otherwise protecting from the wall W. Since the socket K forming part of the utility-related structure is external to both the wall W and the adjacent siding strip, a hinged cover V is normally provided on the face plate FP. This cover V can be manually opened to expose the socket K or closed to cover it from the elements. A fastener, such as a bolt B, may also be provided for securing the face plate FP directly to the socket K, as is well known in the art.

To secure the component 10 adjacent to the exposed portion of the wall W, such as over the siding strip S_1, a number of different means for attachment may be used. For example, it may be fastened directly to the sheeting T. This fastening may be completed using conventional mechanical fasteners, such as screws 20a (see Figure 3b) or nails (not shown), that are placed through additional fastener-receiving apertures 20 formed in the body 12, such as in the engagement surface 18. As shown in Figure 4, integral tubes 22 corresponding to the apertures may optionally be provided for guiding the selected fasteners into engagement with the wall W. Washers (not shown) may also be provided on all fasteners to ensure that the desired tight seating

engagement is established with the engagement surface 18.

Alternatively, the component 10 may be held in place by way of engagement with an adjacent siding strip, with or without additional mechanical fasteners. For example, with reference to Figures 2 and 3b, the body 12 of the component 10 includes at least one, and preferably a pair of integral fasteners for assisting in securing it to at least one siding strip S_1. With reference to Figure 2, the lower portion of the body 12 may include an upturned flange 24 defining a hook-like portion that serves as an integral fastener. This hook-like integral fastener 24 is adapted for engaging a corresponding receiver 26 in an adjacent siding strip, which is illustrated in Figure 3b as comprising a C-shaped, integral channel formed in an upper portion 28 of the lower siding strip S_0. For a perspective view of a siding strip S (which may be identical to strip S_o) with such a receiver 26, see Figure 3a, and for a detailed description, see commonly assigned, co-pending application Ser. No. 09/624,672, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

Normally, this receiver 26 receives a similar hook-like integral, fastener portion P of an adjacent siding strip S, such as the one shown in Figure 3a. However, in the embodiment shown in Figure 3b, this portion P of the strip S_1 is cutaway prior to or during installation to expose the sheeting T, and hence, the utility-related structure (not shown) projecting through or from the wall W. In Figure 3b, only a center portion of the strip S_1 is removed to expose the wall W where the utility-related structure is located. Hence, the upper and end portions of strip S_1 remain and preferably underlie the component 10 (note curved phantom lines in Figure 5 designating the ends of the strip S_1 underlying the component 10). The receiver 26 is preferably oversized to provide room for receiving both the hook-like integral fastener portion P_1 of the strip S_1 that remains (not shown in Figure 3b) and the preferably correspondingly shaped hook-like integral fastener portion 24 of the component 10 at both ends thereof

(both of which are usually very thin). Alternatively, the components may be secured using VELCRO, hook and loop, adhesives, or any known fastening means.

Still referring to Figure 3b, only an upper end portion 32 of the strip S_1 remains adjacent to an upper portion or tongue 30 of the component 10, the rest having been cutaway as previously described (note cutaway portion Y shown in phantom in Figure 3a). In one embodiment, this remaining upper end portion 32 of the strip S_1 is plate-like for resting against the sheeting T and receiving a fastener, such as the nail N shown in Figures 3a and 3b (and is preferably identical in shape to the upper portion 28 of strip S_o, as well as any other strips employed). Adjacent to this upper end 32, an integral receiver 34 may be provided for receiving the hook-like integral fastener portion P_2 at the lower end of the next-adjacent siding strip S_2.

The remaining upper end portion 32 of the strip S_1 may further comprise a depending portion 36, which terminates as the result of the cut made to expose the utility-related structure passing through the wall W. This depending portion 36 thus defines a channel with the adjacent wall W, and in particular, the sheeting T, that serves as a receiver 38 for receiving the tongue 30 of the component 10. The tongue 30 is preferably vertically oriented and thus may be received in the receiver 38. Specifically, and preferably after the hook-like lower portion 24 is installed, the component 10 is flexed outwardly such that the end of the tongue 30 may be inserted in the receiver 38 and captured by the depending portion 36. The tongue 30 forms an integral fastener that fits in the receiver 38 and thus serves as an attachment means for positioning the component 10 adjacent to the wall W.

As should be appreciated by one skilled in the art, to simultaneously allow the ends of the component 10 to overlap the corresponding ends of the existing siding strip S_1, it may be necessary to cutaway a portion of

the component 10, such as the outermost corners 40 of the tongue 30, as shown in phantom in both Figure 2 and Figure 5. This can be done at the time of installation. Alternatively, the component 10 could be manufactured having a frangible portion that allows for this corner 40 to be easily broken away. Still another alternative is to form the component 10 without the corner 40 present. However, this means that a precision cut is required to ensure that a close fit is provided between the preformed ends of the siding strip S_1 and the ends of the tongue 30.

Turning to Figure 6, the component 10 instead may be positioned over a portion of the wall W exposed between two adjacent siding strips S_{1a}, S_{1b} spaced apart in the same horizontal plane. In this case, it is unnecessary to cutaway a portion of siding strip S_1 to expose the portion of the utility related structure passing through or projecting from the wall W, a couple of options, or means, are available for attaching the component 10 adjacent to the wall W. For example, the component 10 may be held in place solely by fasteners, such as screws 20a, placed through the fastener-receiving apertures 20 formed in the engagement surface 18. Of course, this makes cutting the outer corners 40 unnecessary, since the component 10 merely overlies the ends of the adjacent horizontally extending siding strips S_{1a}, S_{1b}. Figure 6 also shows a socket K that is secured to the engagement surface using fasteners positioned in holes 19 (only one shown). The socket K is depicted having an integral hinged cover V, which dispenses with the need for a separate face plate FP.

Instead of or in addition to non-integral fasteners, the hook-like portion 24 forming an integral fastener at the lower end of the component 10 may optionally be provided to form an interlock with a corresponding receiver 26 on the adjacent siding strip S_0. This fastening arrangement could also be used in the case where a portion of a single siding strip S_1 is removed or cutaway, as described above, in which case the tongue 30 would merely overlie the

depending portion 36.

In the special case shown in Figure 6, the adjacent siding strips S_{1a}, S_{1b} in the same horizontal plane are provided with a portion 42 corresponding to the depending portion 36 in Figure 3b (as is each adjacent siding strip in a different horizontal plane, such as strip S_0 in Figure 6). Where the component 10 is outwardly bowed and otherwise simulates the appearance of a "half-round" log, this portion 42 may be adapted to simulate the appearance of grout or chinking between the siding strips S_{1a}, S_{1b} and strip S_2. In particular, and as described in the above-referenced commonly assigned, co-pending application, this portion 42 is formed so as to have a contrasting color (preferably light gray or white) relative to the other portions of the component 10, the siding strips S_{1a} or S_{1b}, or any adjacent strips S_0, S_2. By providing this portion 42, the realism of the simulation is enhanced by providing the outside observer with the feeling that grout or chinking is provided between the "logs" (which preferably are colored accordingly, and may even include surface indicia I to enhance the realism of the simulation).

It is of course desirable to keep the component 10 from detracting from the realism of the simulation thus provided, especially in the case where the tongue 30 is placed directly over the portion 42 of the adjacent siding strips S_{1a}, S_{1b} (as opposed to under, in the case of where the integral fastener defined by the upper portion 10 is placed under the depending portion 36, which may also have an outer surface simulating the appearance of grout or chinking). To do so, this tongue 30 may also be provided with a contrasting color to simulate the appearance of grout or chinking. In addition to a contrasting color, optional surface roughening may also be provided, as described in the co-pending application, to further enhance the realism of the simulation.

Figure 7 depicts an embodiment wherein the component 10 of Figure 5 is used for receiving a water pipe (not shown) as part of the utility-

related structure. A spigot SP is secured to the end of the pipe projecting beyond the wall W. A threaded locking collar L, either integral with or separate from the spigot SP, is tightened down over a removable cover C, which is a component or portion of the utility-related structure. When seated against the engagement surface 18 in this manner, the cover C serves to cover the opening 14. Optional fasteners, such as screws or nails, may be placed through the apertures 20 as described above to assist in holding the component 10 in place, especially in the case where the tongue 30 is not tucked under a depending portion 36 (or 42) of the siding strip S_1. Apertures 19 are generally not used in this arrangement, and thus may be covered (including by cover C) or sealed if present (or any frangible portion may simply be left intact). However, in the case where the cover is for a dryer vent (not shown), these apertures 19 may be used.

An alternate embodiment of the component 10 for use in situations where it is placed directly between (and preferably overlapping) the ends of two adjacent horizontal siding strips S_{1a}, S_{1b} extending in the same horizontal plane is shown in Figure 8. In this embodiment, the component 10 includes an upper portion 50 having a plate-like fastener receiving portion 52 that is similar or identical in construction to the upper portion 32 provided on the siding strip S_1, as shown in Figures 3a and 3b. This fastener-receiving portion 52 may include preformed apertures 54 for receiving fasteners, such as nails (not shown), that are used to secure the component directly to the wall W over the location at which a wire, pipe, conduit, support, or other portion of a utility related structure passes. A receiver 56 for receiving an integral fastener portion of an adjacent siding strip (not shown), such as a hook-like engagement portion to create an interlock, also forms a part of this upper portion 50.

In the case where the component 10 is outwardly bowed and otherwise simulates the appearance of a "half-round" log, an integral portion 58 having a surface that simulates the appearance of grout or chinking may also be

provided adjacent to the receiver 56. As should be appreciated, this portion 58 thus provides the desired simulation of grout or chinking between the simulated "logs" when the corresponding portion of the adjacent siding strip is positioned in the receiver 56 during installation. The lower portion of the component 10 may also be provided with an integral fastener, such as an upturned flange 60 corresponding to integral fastener 24, for engaging and interlocking with the receiver (not shown) of the next-adjacent siding strip (not shown). Again, a full description of the overall siding system for which the particular component shown in Figure 8 may be used is found in the commonly assigned, co-pending application previously noted.

As should be appreciated, in using the embodiment of Figure 8, it may be necessary to cutaway a corresponding upper portion 32 at the ends of the adjacent siding strips S_{1a}, S_{1b} to allow the upper portion 50 to directly engage the wall W and simultaneously provide the desirable covering and overlapping function. A corresponding adjustment need not be made at the lower portion of the component 10, since the hook-like portion 60 forming the integral fastener may fit in the oversized receiver, such as receiver 26 in Figure 3b, along with the similar portion P provided at the end of each siding strip S_{1a}, S_{1b} (see, e.g., Figure 3a).

Figures 9a and 9b are perspective and rear elevational views, respectively, of yet another embodiment of the component 10. In this embodiment, integral fasteners are provided along both the upper and lower portions of the component 10. These fasteners take the form of hook-like portions 62, 64 of the body 12, each for engaging the receiver in a next-adjacent siding strip (see in Figure 3b, and note receivers 26, 34 in siding strips S_0 and S_2, which are preferably slightly oversized and thus capable of receiving both the hook-like portions 62, 64 and an integral fastener of the siding strip, such as strip S_2, if necessary). This embodiment may thus dispense with the need for cutting

away any portion of the component 10 during installation, as well as the need for the optional fasteners, such as screws or nails, for extending into the wall W. Full support adjacent to the wall W is instead provided by the interlock created by the engagement established between the integral fasteners 62, 64 and the corresponding receivers (not shown).

Figure 10 illustrates still another embodiment of the component 10. This embodiment may be constructed essentially as described above, but with the engagement surface 18 recessed relative to the outer surface of the component 10, which is shown as being outwardly bowed. This is in contrast to the embodiments shown in the other figures, wherein most, if not all, of the engagement surface 18 is raised above the outer surface of the component 10. However, the engagement function provided is essentially the same.

Conventionally, the component 10, like each siding strip S is fabricated of injection molded vinyl or plastic, but materials such as aluminum, composites (e.g., a glass fiber reinforced polymeric material), or other well-known materials, and particularly those conventionally used to fabricate siding or otherwise used to cover the external walls of buildings, may be employed instead. The particular material is preferably inexpensive, durable, and generally capable of providing the component 10 with an inherent resiliency that allows it to bend, if necessary, and also makes it somewhat resistant to crushing as the result of an externally applied impact force (such as the force created by hail, wind, rain, etc., or even the foot or hand of a worker during installation). Sealants or adhesives may also be used as necessary to enhance the fluid-imperviousness of the siding once installed.

The foregoing descriptions of the various embodiments of the invention are presented for purposes of illustration and description. They are not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed. Obvious modifications or variations are possible in light of the above teachings.

For example, it is reiterated that the use of non-integral mechanical fasteners alone may be sufficient to hold the component 10 in place, without the need for integral fasteners as provided in several of the embodiments described above. Also, while the particular use of the component 10 in a siding system for simulating the appearance of a dwelling formed of logs is shown in the drawing figures, it should be appreciated that the component may be adapted for use with any type of siding system, including those where the strips having a substantially planar, sloping, or irregularly shaped outer surface. The embodiments described provide the best illustration of the principles of the invention and its practical application to thereby enable one of ordinary skill in the art to utilize the invention in various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. All such modifications and variations are within the scope of the invention as determined by the appended claims when interpreted in accordance with the breadth to which they are fairly, legally and equitably entitled.